



Uruguay

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2001](#)

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The Oriental Republic of Uruguay is a constitutional republic with an elected president and a bicameral legislature. In 1999 in free and fair elections voters elected Senator Jorge Batlle of the Colorado party as President; he assumed office on March 1, 2000, for a 5-year term. In legislative elections in 1999 the left-of-center Broad Front coalition won approximately 40 percent of the vote in a four-party race, thus constituting the largest congressional bloc. The two traditional parties, the Colorados and the Blancos, which collaborate in a coalition-style arrangement, together control over half of the seats in the legislature. The judiciary is generally independent.

The Interior Ministry administers the country's police departments and the prison system and is responsible for domestic security and public safety. The military is responsible for external security within the prison system. The civilian authorities exercise effective control over the security forces. Unlike the previous year, there were no reports of human rights abuses by the police during the year.

The country's population is estimated at 3.2 million. The economy is a mixture of private and state enterprises and is heavily dependent on agricultural exports and agroindustry. The leading exports are meat, leather, and rice. The unemployment rate was estimated at 16 percent in July. The economy contracted by 1.3 percent during the year, following a decline of 2.8 percent in 2000. Annual per capita income was about \$6,000 in 2000.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, and the law and judiciary generally provide effective means of dealing with individual instances of abuse; however, there were problems in some areas, principally poor prison conditions, and delays in the judicial process. Court cases sometimes last for many years, resulting in lengthy pretrial detention. Violence against women and societal discrimination against women and the black minority are problems. There was one report that children had been trafficked into the country.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary and Other Unlawful Taking of Life

There were no reports of arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents. At least two prisoners were killed by other prisoners during the year (see Section 1.c.).

The 1986 Amnesty Law prohibits criminal prosecution of members of the security forces who perpetrated extrajudicial killings, torture, and other abuses during the 12 years of military rule from 1973-85. However, some victims and relatives of victims had success using the civilian courts to seek redress.

An appeals court decision in December overturned a 1998 trial-level court decision awarding damages to 12 former political prisoners and their families who sued the Government for damages suffered as a result of their imprisonment, torture, and in three cases death in custody during the military dictatorship. Although in 1998 a trial-level court ordered the Government to pay each plaintiff approximately \$93,600 (1.17 million pesos) in damages, an appellate-level court later reduced this award to approximately \$16,850 (210,600 pesos) per

person for 11 of the cases and \$23,640 (295,500 pesos) for the other case. The plaintiffs appealed the trial-level court's decision. In December Appellate Court Judge Rolando Vomero dismissed the case, on the grounds that since the individual responsible for the deaths, then-Minister of Defense Enrique Magnani, died in 1987, there was no one to charge with the crime (see Section 1.c.).

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

The 1986 Amnesty Law required the Government to investigate the fate of those citizens who were detained and who then disappeared during the dictatorship; the first three administrations following the return to democracy consistently refused to do so. In 2000 the new Government for the first time undertook such an effort, and these efforts continued during the year.

In August 2000, President Batlle created a National Peace Commission in order to clarify the fate of 179 Uruguayans believed to have disappeared for political reasons during the dictatorship (137 in Argentina, 30 in Uruguay, 7 in Chile, 3 in Paraguay, 1 in Bolivia, and 1 in Brazil). The Commission was charged with receiving and analyzing information relevant to the disappeared persons. It is to prepare individual summaries of its conclusions as to the fate of each person and to recommend legal measures that the Government should adopt to compensate the families of the victims and resolve the victims' legal status, such as by declaring them legally dead. By year's end, the Commission had discovered the fates of up to 16 missing Uruguayans; with the families' permission results in 8 cases were released to the press. A poll showed that more than 80 percent of the population approves of the Peace Commission, which consists of six members appointed by the President and operates under the supervision of the office of the President. One retired military officer told the press that "hundreds" of current and retired officers serving during the period of military rule had adopted a pact of silence with regard to the disappearances, and the military has stated that they will not apologize for their actions during this time. Although the Commission was created with an initial mandate of 120 days, in December 2000 that mandate was extended and the President has stated that it will continue to be extended as long as needed. The Commission's findings are shared directly with the relatives of the persons who disappeared, but no information is made public unless the families agree.

Some persons have sought justice in non-Uruguayan courts for human rights violations that occurred during military rule. In 1999 Sara Mendez filed papers in an Argentine court formally accusing five retired members of the Uruguayan military with the 1976 kidnaping of her infant from her Buenos Aires home. The case remained pending in Argentine courts. During the year, Mendez gave testimony on several occasions and traveled through Europe to seek international support for her case; and the Peace Commission was working on the case at year's end. An Italian prosecutor continued to investigate charges brought in an Italian court in 1999 against four present and former members of the military and one police officer accused of responsibility in the disappearance of eight Italian-Uruguayan dual nationals.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits brutal treatment of prisoners; unlike in the previous year, there were no reports of abuses by police. On occasion such abuse had resulted in forced confessions (see Section 1.d.).

The judicial and parliamentary branches of government are responsible for investigating specific allegations of abuse. An internal police investigative unit receives complaints from any person concerning possible noncriminal police abuse of power, but it is understaffed and only can issue recommendations for disciplinary action. Ministry of Interior authorities act promptly if accusations of alleged police brutality are reported. Police officers charged with less serious crimes may continue on active duty; those charged with more serious crimes are separated from active service until a court resolves their cases. The 1995 Public Security Law requires a proportional use of force by the police and the use of weapons only as a last resort, in accordance with U.N. codes regarding the use of force; and this law is respected in practice. During the year a judge sentenced a female police officer to a prison term for shooting into a group of men who were attacking her in Montevideo.

The appeal of a group of 12 former political prisoners (and their survivors) to reverse a reduction in the award made by a trial court for the damages that they suffered due to their imprisonment and torture was dismissed in December (see Section 1.a.).

Conditions in prisons for the approximately 5,230 prisoners remain poor but not life threatening. A 1997 legislative human rights commission report criticized the "excessive use of force and abuse of authority" by prison guards and officials, and stated that sanitation and health standards in the prison system were "unacceptable." This report reflected the work of a previous commission that in 1996 published a report to the

Government citing overcrowding, lack of staff training, corruption, and physical violence as problems. Due to budget problems, such conditions have not improved since these reports. Prisons remain overcrowded, with up to eight prisoners sharing a cell. There is also a need for 400 more corrections officers. During the year, the army was called in to guard the perimeter of at least one prison, COMCAR, located in San Jose Province, following problems that included multiple escapes and prisoners taking a film crew hostage. At least two prisoners were killed in COMCAR during the year, in reprisals for providing information to the authorities. Prisoners often must supplement prison provisions with bedding, medicines, and toiletries brought by friends or relatives. According to press reports and a study conducted by Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJ), a nongovernmental organization (NGO), HIV-positive inmates sometimes received inadequate medical treatment.

Female prisoners are held in separate facilities from male prisoners; most are held in a women's prison in Montevideo. Some provincial prisons have separate facilities for their small number of female prisoners. In general conditions for female prisoners are significantly better than for male prisoners, in large part because of the small number of female inmates.

Minors are held in institutions operated by the National Institute for Minors (INAME). The 1995 Public Security Law allows the Government to put minors with a record of violent crimes in adult prisons if INAME has no room in its own institutions. Even though the law stipulates that minors would occupy separate facilities within the prisons, human rights groups adamantly opposed this provision. As a result, INAME decided not to send minors to adult prisons and did not do so during the year. Juvenile offenders are separated according to their gender, age, and the severity of their crime. Juveniles who commit serious crimes are incarcerated in juvenile detention centers, which resemble traditional jails and have cells. Conditions in these facilities are generally better than those in ordinary jails, in part because they are less crowded. Juvenile offenders who pose less of a threat to society are placed in halfway house facilities, oriented toward rehabilitation, in which a group of offenders lives together with adult counselors. These facilities provide educational, vocational, and other opportunities, and the juvenile offenders are able to enter and leave without restriction.

The Government did not permit general prison visits by independent human rights monitors during the year, citing safety issues as the reason. However, inmate visitation continued and foreign diplomats could visit prisons.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution requires the police to have a written warrant issued by a judge before making an arrest, and the authorities generally respected this provision in practice. The only exception is when the police apprehend the accused during commission of a crime. The Constitution also provides the accused with the right to a judicial determination of the legality of detention and requires that the detaining authority explain the legal grounds for the detention. In June 2000, the President signed a new law that obligates police officers to inform individuals of the reason for their arrest. Police may hold a detainee incommunicado for 24 hours before presenting the case to a judge, at which time the detainee has the right to counsel. It was during this period of time that police sometimes had abused detainees, occasionally resulting in forced confessions (see Section 1.c.); however, unlike the previous year, there were no reports of such abuse during the year.

The law stipulates that confessions obtained by the police before a detainee appears before a judge and attorney (without the police present) have no validity. Further, should a detainee claim that he has been mistreated, by law the judge must investigate the charge.

If the detainee cannot afford a lawyer, the courts appoint a public defender. If the crime carries a penalty of at least 2 years in prison, the accused person is confined during the judge's investigation of the charges unless the authorities agree to release the person on bail (which seldom happens). As a result, as of mid-2000 approximately 73 percent of all persons incarcerated were awaiting a final decision in their case (compared with 68 percent in mid-1999). Because of the slowness of the judicial process, the length of time detainees spend in jail before the judge issues a verdict may exceed the maximum sentence for their crime if convicted. The uncertainty as to how long one may be imprisoned is a factor creating tension within the country's prisons.

The Government does not use forced exile. The Constitution provides that in extreme cases of national emergency an individual may be given the option to leave the country as an alternative to trial or imprisonment; however, this option has not been exercised for at least 2 decades.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government generally respects this provision

in practice.

The Supreme Court heads the judiciary system and supervises the work of the lower courts. A parallel military court system operates under a Military Justice Code. Two military justices sit on the Supreme Court but participate only in cases involving the military. Military justice applies to civilians only during a state of war or insurrection.

Trial proceedings usually are based on written arguments to the judge, which are not made public routinely. Only the judge, prosecutor, and defense attorney have access to all documents that form part of the written record. Individual judges may hear oral arguments at their option. Most judges choose the written method, a major factor slowing the judicial process. There is no legal provision against self-incrimination, and judges may compel defendants to answer any question they pose. Either the defense attorney or the prosecutor may appeal convictions to a higher court, which may acquit the person of the crime, confirm the conviction, or reduce or increase the sentence.

A 1997 law to reform and modernize the Criminal Code provides for more oral argument by prosecution and defense attorneys, less investigative responsibility for judges, and is expected to accelerate the pace of criminal trials. Although the law was to take effect in 1998, budget constraints have resulted in repeated postponement of its implementation, and it is not scheduled for implementation until 2004.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such practices and the Government generally respected these prohibitions in practice.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, the authorities sometimes limit freedom of the press and the authorities may abridge these rights if persons are deemed to be inciting violence or "insulting the nation." All elements of the political spectrum freely express their viewpoints in both print and broadcast media.

Montevideo has 5 daily newspapers and 10 widely read weeklies; there are also approximately 80 other weekly and a few daily newspapers throughout the country. Montevideo has one government-affiliated and three commercial television stations. There are about 150 radio stations, 34 television stations, and 200 cable television stations in the country.

The law stipulates that expression and communication of thoughts and opinions are free, within the limits contained in the Constitution, and it outlines methods of responding to "inexact or aggravating information." The law calls for between 3 months' and 2 years' imprisonment for "knowingly divulging false news that causes a grave disturbance to the public peace or a grave prejudice to economic interests of the State" or for "insulting the nation, the State, or their powers." The authorities rarely use this law and did not do so during the year.

Human rights activists and journalists have alleged that state enterprises such as the telephone and electric companies on occasion have withheld advertising from independent media that are critical of the Government and have favored media friendly to the Government with extensive paid advertising.

The national university is autonomous, and the Government does not restrict academic freedom.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The law provides for the freedoms of assembly and association, and the Government generally respects them in practice.

In May, as in prior years, thousands of persons marched in memory of the persons who disappeared during the rule of the dictatorship (see Section 1.b.).

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There is a strict separation of church and state, and religious instruction in public schools is prohibited.

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights, and the Government generally respects them in practice.

The Government grants refugee status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Government grants asylum only for political crimes as set forth in the 1928 Treaty of Havana, the 1889 Treaty of Montevideo, and the 1954 Caracas Convention. The Government cooperates with the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. The Government grants first asylum in cases in which a refugee's claims are verified by the UNHCR. The Government continues to cooperate with international organizations to provide temporary residence to human rights advocates who claim that they are subject to persecution in their home country; if still at risk after 1 year, the person may apply for refugee status.

There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercise this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage. The country is a multiparty democracy with mandatory voting for those 18 years of age or older. The Colorado party, the National (Blanco) party, the Broad Front coalition, and the New Space party are the four major political groupings.

In November 1999, in free and fair elections, voters elected Senator Jorge Batlle of the Colorado party President, and he assumed office on March 1, 2000, for a 5-year term. In legislative elections in October 1999, the left-of-center Broad Front coalition won approximately 40 percent of the vote in a four-party race, thus constituting the largest congressional bloc. The two traditional parties, the Colorados and the Blancos, which collaborate in a coalition-style arrangement, together control over half of the seats in the legislature.

The percentage of women and minorities in government and politics does not correspond to their percentage in the population. Three of 30 senators and 13 of 99 deputies are women. None of the 13 cabinet ministers are women. There are no female justices on the Supreme Court. In 2000 for the first time, an Afro-Uruguayan elected as an alternate deputy substituted in legislative sessions for an absent deputy for approximately 10 days.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups operate without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials are generally cooperative and responsive to their views.

In August 2000, the President created a Peace Commission to clarify the circumstances surrounding the persons who disappeared for political reasons during the 1973-85 military dictatorship (see Section 1.b.).

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution and the law prohibit discrimination based on race, sex, religion, or disability. Despite these provisions, discrimination against some groups exists.

Women

Violence against women continues to be a serious problem. A 1999 Ministry of Public Health study projected that within 5 years, domestic violence would constitute the second most prevalent threat to public health, after

traffic accidents. The law provides for sentences of 6 months to 2 years in prison for a person found guilty of committing an act of violence or of making continuing threats to cause bodily injury to persons related emotionally or legally to the perpetrator. The State-owned telephone company provides a free nationwide hot line answered by trained NGO employees for victims of domestic violence. Between January and September, the service received 2,596 calls, a rate lower than in previous years. Persons calling the hot line are provided counseling, free legal advice, and may be referred to NGO's that can provide further social services. A law signed in June 2000 increased sentences for rape and certain other sexually related crimes. The Criminal Code covers spousal abuse and spousal rape, although criminal charges rarely are initiated for those crimes.

A government office of assistance for victims of domestic violence trains police how to resolve complaints of violence against women. A directorate within the Ministry of Interior continued a public awareness campaign about domestic violence and operated community assistance centers where abuse victims receive information and referrals to government and private organizations in their area that aid abused women. Both the Ministry of Interior and NGO's operate shelters in which abused women and their families can seek temporary refuge.

The law prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace; however, few complaints ever are filed under this provision because it is not perceived as a problem.

Women enjoy equality under the law in the workplace but face discrimination stemming from traditional attitudes and practices. However, there never have been any cases brought under the law. The work force exhibits segregation by gender. Women, who make up almost one-half the work force, tend to be concentrated in lower paying jobs. Women's salaries average two-thirds those of men, a figure that reflects gradual improvement in recent years with respect to pay equity. In 2000 about 60 percent of the students at the public university were women. Women often pursue professional careers but are underrepresented in traditionally male-dominated professions.

A national commission for workplace equality includes representatives from the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Education and Culture, chambers of commerce, and the umbrella labor organization.

The Air Force commissioned four female officers in December 2000, a first for the military; they are conducting air combat training. In December the first four female cadets graduated from the army's military academy.

A small institute in the Ministry of Education coordinates government programs for women. There are a number of active women's rights groups, and many of their activities remained centered on followup to the platform of action of the 1995 U.N. Conference on Women.

Children

The Government generally is committed to protecting children's rights and welfare, and it regards the education and health of children as a top priority. An institute in the Ministry of Interior oversees implementation of the Government's programs for children but receives only limited funding for programs. The Government provides free, compulsory primary and secondary education, and 95 percent of children complete their primary education. Girls and boys are treated similarly. Free education is available through the undergraduate level at the national university.

There is no societal pattern of abuse of children. Minors under the age of 18 are not subject to criminal trial but receive special treatment with special judges and, when sentenced, stay in institutions run by INAME for the period determined by the judge; these institutions emphasize the rehabilitation of minors. INAME maintains an extensive network of programs, including shelters for at-risk children. INAME also operates a confidential hot line for children who are victims of domestic abuse.

An estimated 40 percent of children under the age of 5 live in the poorest 20 percent of homes. While health care is free to all citizens, the Government with the help of UNICEF has undertaken a program to educate parents regarding the need for regular checkups and immunization.

In May the authorities discovered a group of children trafficked to the country for labor (See Section 6.f.).

Persons with Disabilities

A national disabilities commission oversees implementation of a law on the rights of persons with disabilities. Although the law mandates accessibility for persons with disabilities only to new buildings or public services, the Government provides access to a number of existing buildings. The law reserves 4 percent of public sector

jobs for persons with disabilities. There is no governmental discrimination against disabled persons in employment, education, or in the provision of other state services. The country has a generally excellent mental health system and an interest in the rights of persons with mental disabilities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The country's Afro-Uruguayan minority, estimated at 5.9 percent of the population, continues to face societal discrimination. A government study conducted in 1996-97 found that the unemployment rate for blacks was 1.5 times the rate for whites. The National Institute of Statistics found that blacks earn an average of 20 percent less than whites who perform the same job. According to a study published in 1999 by the NGO Mundo Afro, the illiteracy rate among black women is twice the national average, and the percentage of black women who have pursued higher education is one-third the rate in the population at large. According to the same study, one-half of Afro-Uruguayan women work as household domestics. Blacks are practically unrepresented in the bureaucratic and academic sectors.

Religious Minorities

Isolated neo-Nazi elements have carried out occasional, limited attacks and racist and Anti-Semitic activities since 1997. Law enforcement authorities have responded vigorously to such activities. In September 2000, the police arrested and charged with inciting racial hatred the leader of small neo-Nazi group believed responsible for pro-Nazi propagandizing; he was convicted and sentenced to jail.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution states that laws should promote the organization of trade unions and the creation of arbitration bodies; however, there is almost no legislation concerning union activities. Unions traditionally organize and operate free of government regulation. Civil servants, employees of state-run enterprises, and private enterprise workers may join unions. Unionization is high in the public sector (over 80 percent) and low in the private sector (under 5 percent). Labor unions are independent of political party control but traditionally have associated more closely with the Broad Front, the leftist political coalition.

The Constitution provides workers with the right to strike. The Government may legally compel workers to work during a strike if they perform an essential service which, if interrupted, "could cause a grave prejudice or risk, provoking suffering to part or all of the society." On July 25, the umbrella labor confederation--the Workers' Inter-Union Plenary/National Workers' Confederation (PIT/CNT)--organized a 1-day general strike. There were other smaller strikes during the year but fewer of these than in 2000.

There are mechanisms for resolving workers' complaints against employers, but unions complained that these mechanisms sometimes were applied arbitrarily. The law generally prohibits discriminatory acts by employers, including arbitrary dismissals for union activity. Unions maintain that organizers are dismissed for fabricated reasons, thus allowing employers to avoid penalty under the law.

There are no restrictions on the right of unions to form confederations or to affiliate with international trade union groups; however, the one national confederation has chosen not to affiliate officially with any of the world federations. Some individual unions are affiliated with international trade secretariats.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Collective bargaining between companies and their unions determines a number of private sector salaries. The executive branch, acting independently, determines public sector salaries. There are no laws prohibiting antiunion discrimination, but a 1993 executive decree established fines for employers engaging in antiunion activities. The law does not require employers to reinstate workers fired for union activities. However, in cases of legal challenges by union activists, courts tend to impose indemnization levels that are higher than those normally paid to dismissed workers.

At the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Governing Body meeting in March, the Association of Workers and Employees brought allegations against the Government concerning antiunion measures, such as collective bargaining and disciplinary measures against trade union officials and workers. At the ILO's governing meeting in June, the Association of Bank Employees of Uruguay brought allegations against the government concerning antiunion dismissals, threats of dismissal, and irregular denouncement of a collective

agreement. Both complaints remained pending at year's end.

The Ministry of Labor has a labor commission that investigates antiunion discrimination claims filed by union members. In 2000 there were 5 antiunion discrimination claims, compared with 16 claims in 1999; all 5 cases were resolved and workers were rehired with full rights. Most complaints are resolved within a few months. Labor unions have complained that some businesses have encouraged formation of worker cooperatives, which serve to reduce their labor costs. Although such cooperatives do not necessarily affect workers' social insurance and other public benefits, this outsourcing can reduce workers' job security, result in a loss of seniority, and weaken the power of trade unions and of collective bargaining.

All labor legislation fully covers workers employed in the eight special export zones. There are no unions in these zones, but the few workers employed there are not in traditionally organizable occupations.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or compulsory labor, and it is not known to occur. The law prohibits forced or bonded labor by children, and the Government generally enforces this prohibition effectively; however, there was one report that children were trafficked into forced labor (see Section 6.f.).

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The Child Labor Code protects children; the Ministry of Labor and Social Security is responsible for enforcing the law. Some children work as street vendors in the expanding informal sector or in the agrarian sector, which generally are regulated less strictly and where pay is lower. By law minors under the age of 14 may not be granted permission to work, and this is generally enforced in practice. Minors between the ages of 14 and 15 are granted permission to work only in extremely rare circumstances and even then usually only to work with other members of their families. Minors between the ages of 15 and 18 require government permission to work, and such permission is not granted for dangerous, fatiguing, or night work.

Permission to work is only granted to minors who have completed 9 years of compulsory education or who remain enrolled in school and are working toward completing the period of compulsory education. Controls over salaries and hours for children are more strict than those for adults. Children over the age of 16 may sue in court for payment of wages, and children have the legal right to dispose of their own income. A program by INAME and an NGO to pay families \$83 (1,000 pesos) per month to parents who take their children off the streets and send them to school continued during the year. This amount approximates what a child might earn working on the street. In 1999 the Government created a National Committee for the Eradication of Child Labor, which continues to work on creating a national action plan to combat child labor.

In August the Government ratified ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labor. Most elements of the Convention already were codified in labor law, which INAME and other government agencies enforce.

The law prohibits forced or bonded labor by children, and the Government generally enforces this prohibition effectively (see Section 6.c.). However, in May the authorities discovered a small child-labor ring (see Section 6.f.).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The Ministry of Labor effectively enforces a legislated minimum monthly wage which is in effect in both the public and private sectors. The Ministry adjusts the minimum wage whenever it adjusts public sector wages. The minimum wage, which was set in January at about \$80 (1,092 pesos) per month, functions more as an index for calculating wage rates than as a true measure of minimum subsistence levels, and it would not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. The vast majority of workers earn more than the minimum wage.

The standard workweek is 48 hours in industry and 44 hours in commerce, with a 36-hour break each week. The law stipulates that industrial workers receive overtime compensation for work in excess of 48 hours and that workers are entitled to 20 days of paid vacation after a year of employment.

The law protects foreign workers and does not discriminate against them. However, in order to receive official protection, the companies that employ foreign workers must report them as employees. Many workers--both native and foreign--work off the books and thus forfeit certain legal protections.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Security enforces legislation regulating health and safety conditions in a generally effective manner. However, some of the regulations cover urban industrial workers more adequately than rural and agricultural workers. Workers have the right to remove themselves from what they consider hazardous or dangerous conditions.

f. Trafficking in Persons

There are no laws specifically addressing trafficking in persons; however, there were some infrequent cases involving trafficking.

In May the authorities discovered a small child-labor ring. Traffickers had promised a better life to seven Ecuadorian youths and one young adult, as well as one Colombian; however, once in the country they were forced to work in inadequate conditions, including working 80 hours a week, carrying heavy packages, and receiving inadequate food. In addition, the youth were denied proper medical care, and one girl had to have her finger amputated. The ringleaders were tried, convicted, and imprisoned on charges of violating the child protection and labor laws. INAME placed the youth in temporary shelters and repatriated them to Ecuador in coordination with the Ecuadorian Consulate.

There are no reliable estimates on the number of Uruguayan women who work as prostitutes abroad generally in Europe and Australia or the proportion of them who were induced into such work by fraud or are subjected to conditions approaching servitude.

The country is also used infrequently as a transit country by traffickers; however, there were no reports of such activity during the year.

In 1999 government authorities discovered three Somalis working in peonage on a farm near the capital, presumably earning the cost of their onward trip to Central America.

The Ministry of the Interior has primary responsibility for investigating trafficking cases.